
IN THE NEWS Developer proposes housing project with all lower-cost units Downtown

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With the city desperately seeking affordable Downtown housing, a developer is proposing a four-story apartment project just blocks from Madison's Capitol Square with all units offering lower-cost rents.

Bear Development, of Kenosha, is proposing to reuse and transform a two-story office building and add new construction to create the four-story project with 45 apartments at 402 W. Wilson St.



All apartments — 19 one-bedroom units and 26 two-bedroom units — would be available to those making up to 60% of Dane County Area Median Income, or \$49,500 for a household of two. The project would be primarily funded with 4% Low-Income Housing Tax Credits and Tax-Exempt Bonds through the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority, a submission to the city says.

The proposal offers individual unit balconies as well as a raised rooftop patio on the western side of the building above the parking garage. The project would also provide underground parking for 40 vehicles and bicycles.

The existing building, constructed in 1957 and last updated in 1999, was originally the State Bar of Wisconsin headquarters and most recently home to the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry, said Ald. Mike Verveer, whose 4th District includes the site. It was assessed at \$2.53 million for 2021.

"I'm really thrilled we finally have interest in a 100% affordable housing project in the core Downtown," Verveer said. "This is a sign of progress and hopefully the first of many that will be proposed in the future."

Nick Orthmann, Bear's project manager, declined comment, saying the proposal is still early in the process. The development team will make an informal presentation to the city's Urban Design Commission at 4:30 p.m. Wednesday.



The proposal got a generally warm reception at a recent neighborhood meeting, said Jonathan Cooper, chair of the Bassett District of Capitol Neighborhoods Inc.

"I would say that the proposal was generally well received by the neighbors in attendance and that people liked the concept of incorporating the existing building into the new development," Cooper said. "The neighborhood definitely welcomes the idea of workforce housing, though with rents pegged at 30% of an income that's 60% of the Dane County median, there are concerns regarding how affordable this housing will be."

The development has a lot to like in reusing the office building in terms of sustainability, but the housing units won't be affordable to everyone in the community, Verveer agreed.

Recently, four influential Downtown neighborhood associations offered a joint resolution suggesting that at least 15% of the units be targeted at people making 30% of area median income, or \$24,800 for a household of two, Cooper said. The resolution carries no legal authority.

Neighbors did express concerns about the amount of outdoor space along Broom Street and the potential impact on street trees; the planned use of gas heat rather than an all-electric system or heat pumps; and whether there's enough space for move-ins/move-outs without blocking traffic, Cooper said.

City plans recommend residential development at the site and a maximum height of four stories. The Bassett Neighborhood Plan says the area should be residential in nature with an evolving mix of new, higher-density buildings carefully integrated with existing structures.

Source: https://madison.com/news/local/govt-and-politics/developer-proposes-housing-project-with-all-lower-cost-units-downtown/article_353afcf6-5591-5d7e-a636-42169c9e30e1.html